

seven years. A stronger, stable, prosperous Africa will be a better economic partner, a better partner for security and peace, and a better partner in the fight against the new transnational threats of drug trafficking, crime, terrorism, the spread of disease and environmental degradation. This bill—by significantly broadening market access, spurring growth in Africa, and helping the poorest nations eliminate or reduce their bilateral debt—would help African nations that are committed to undertake difficult economic reforms to build better lives for their people.

We have an historic opportunity to support the renaissance in Africa. I want to commend Speaker Gingrich, Chairman Archer, Congressman Rangel, Congressman McDermott, Congressman Crane, Chairman Gilman, Congressman Hamilton, Congressman Payne, Congresswoman McKinney, Congressman Jefferson, Congresswoman Jackson Lee, Congresswoman Waters, Congressman Royce, Congressman Menendez, and all those who have devoted themselves to helping that transformation. I look forward to working with the Senate to enact this landmark legislation as quickly as possible.

Remarks to the National Association of Attorneys General *March 12, 1998*

Thank you very much, Attorney General Doyle. Attorney General Reno, thank you for joining us here today and for the work you have done with the States' attorneys general and local prosecutors on domestic violence and to reduce the crime rate and a whole host of other issues. I want to thank Fred DuVal for the work he does on my behalf with you and this association. And I'd also like to thank the two former attorneys general that are working for me: Bonnie Campbell, who heads the Attorney General's effort on violence against women; and Chuck Burson, who was formerly president of NAAG, now the Vice President's Counsel.

I've really been looking forward to coming over here today. I have had the opportunity to know and work with most of you personally, and I see some former attorneys general out in the audience who were my colleagues and friends. I thank them for being here.

It used to be a staple of all my speeches that the best job I ever had was being an attorney general, and to me it was. I didn't have to hire or fire anybody—[*laughter*—except the people on the staff. I didn't have to appoint or disappoint anybody. [*Laughter*] Every unpopular thing I did I blamed on the Constitution. [*Laughter*] Now, I'm just a punching bag from time to time—[*laughter*—who's grateful to have an Attorney General. It's a very interesting thing. [*Laughter*]

On a more serious note, I loved the job that you now hold. And I suspect that I ran for

it for the same reason you did: I wanted to protect families and consumers and enforce the law. And you have been very strong allies of our administration and good partners in those endeavors, and I thank you for that very much. In many ways, we are still colleagues, whether it's on domestic violence or reducing crime or giving our young people a more positive future.

Now we're working together to bring our country to the verge of one of the greatest public health achievements in the history of our Nation, a historic triumph in our fight to protect our children from the deadly threat of tobacco. Together we have waged a great struggle in the courts, in the Congress, across the negotiation tables and in our communities, where our children have been the targets of mass-marketing schemes and where you have been on the frontlines to protect them from this effort to get them involved in addiction to tobacco.

We've made a lot of great strides in just a few years. And whenever I talk to any of you who are involved in this, naturally enough, we're always talking about what the present state of play is and what all the various issues are and what's going to happen tomorrow or what happened yesterday. And we can talk about that some more, too. But what I'd like to do is take just a few moments to see how far we've come and then to visualize the outcome that I believe we will achieve—first, to look back and see why we ever took on the tobacco companies in the first place when, when some of

you filed your suits, it was laughable, people said it was a fight that was unwinnable; and second, to look ahead to the end of the day, what we have to do to win the fight to ensure a healthier, stronger America for our children in the new century.

We are poised to enter this new century stronger than we have been in decades. This is a great moment for our country, full of opportunity. We have the lowest unemployment rate in 24 years, the lowest inflation rate in 30 years, the highest homeownership in history, smallest welfare rolls in 27 years, the lowest crime rate in 24 years. It is a great moment of opportunity.

We have a chance to open vistas of peace and prosperity and freedom that our people have never before known. Because most of the next century will belong to our children and grandchildren instead of to ourselves, we, all of us together, have worked these last 5 years to give them a future of safety, health, and security. We've done a lot of specific things in addition to the economic and crime and welfare statistics that I talked about. Here in Washington we have worked with many of you to implement a zero tolerance policy to keep guns and drugs out of schools. The V-chip and the television ratings and educational television have helped parents to strengthen the values as well as the minds of our children.

We've worked to bring order and discipline to our children's lives by supporting community reform efforts like curfews, school uniforms, tougher truancy laws; and to bring hope into their lives by supporting higher educational standards and keeping schools open after hours, because, as all of you know, most juvenile crime is committed when the school doors close for the day but before the parents get home from work. We've worked to support community service, from America Reads to AmeriCorps to America's Challenge. And now we're helping to get millions of uninsured children the health insurance they need.

This is a moment of great opportunity but also of great obligation. And we have to build on this powerful momentum to make the future we want for our children. To me, that's the most important thing that you are doing in the tobacco litigation.

It is so easy in good times to relax, but you and I both know that the world is changing so rapidly that whatever is happening today, there will be something different happening to-

morrow. The sheer volume of knowledge is doubling every 5 years now. We are literally—because of human genome research, we are literally solving problems in a matter of days that took years to solve not long before I took office. The World Wide Web is growing by something like 65,000 websites an hour now. When I took office, there were 50—[laughter]—50. Think about that. Just a little over 5 years ago the Web was the province of a handful of scientists, physicists, started by a Government research project in the Defense Department. The Government, quite properly, having done the basic research and getting it up and going, got out of the way, and now it's the fastest growing organ of human interaction ever, in all of human history.

I say that again to hammer home the fact that when people have confidence because times are good but leaders know times are changing, there is a heavier-than-normal responsibility to do the hard things for tomorrow. That is why it is so important that you have engaged this tobacco issue. I cannot overstate it. You know quite well that smoking kills more people every day than AIDS, alcohol, auto accidents, murders, suicides, drugs, and fires combined and that nearly 90 percent of smokers lit their first cigarette before they turned 18. David Kessler, the former FDA Commissioner, called smoking a pediatric disease. Today and every day, 3,000 children start smoking illegally, and 1,000 will have their lives shortened as a result. This is a national epidemic. It is a national tragedy. We must struggle to end it until we prevail.

Just last month, the Journal of the American Medical Association concluded that advertisements and promotions were even more crucial than peer pressure in getting teens to start smoking. Now, the law says that they can't advertise tobacco products on television or radio, but you can't escape the ads anywhere else, in our magazines, our sports centers, on billboards. Tobacco is one of the most heavily advertised products in America.

In the early 1990's, Joe Camel alone had an advertising budget of \$75 million. He could have run for President. [Laughter] And that's a pretty good investment from the tobacco companies' point of view. More 3- to 6-year-olds could recognize Joe Camel than Mickey Mouse.

The advertisements have taken a deadly toll. That's why you began to bring your lawsuits. That's why in 1995 I launched a nationwide

effort to prevent our tobacco companies from advertising to children, to educate children about the dangers of smoking, to reduce children's access to tobacco products. Working with the FDA, we made it the law of the land, essentially what was already the law in your States: no sale of products to anyone under 18; required ID showings for anyone under 27 to make sure teens don't buy cigarettes. And I'm very proud that last year the courts upheld this authority.

Without the foresight and courage and determination of the attorneys general, the progress would not have occurred. You put tobacco companies on the stand in courtrooms across America. You brought them to the bargaining table. You extracted important concessions. You raised awareness of tobacco's tragic cost to our economy and our children. You got documents out that needed to be out. Your work has been essential, and the American people owe you an eternal debt of gratitude.

The worst part of this epidemic is that it isn't the product of deadly natural forces raging out of control but a sophisticated, deliberate marketing campaign targeted at our children.

I don't know how many of you saw it over the weekend, but there was a story that I saw on at least two different networks about this deadly virus that gets into small rats in the Southwest, and because of El Nino and the warming, the area of influence of this little animal is larger. And the couple hundred people that have gotten this infection from the mice, the small mice, in the last 4 years—the fatality rate has been 50 percent.

We spend a lot of time in our administration trying to make sure that the National Institutes of Health and the CDC has the investment they need both to do the research and then to set up the mechanisms to deal with the spread of disease. And as more and more of us travel to faraway places and more and more people from faraway places travel to us and we meet strangers in the airport, one of the great challenges of the 21st century will be the spread of disease. One of the things that global warming has done is to raise mosquitoes bearing malaria virus to higher and higher altitudes now, so more and more people are exposed to it. Then they travel, and more and more people come in contact with it. There is now an actual public health phenomenon called airport malaria.

I'm saying that not to scare you—we'll figure out how to handle it, we'll deal with it—[laughter]—but the point is that this is what we ought to be worried about; that is, we ought to be worried about those things that are arising out of the natural course of events over which we have no control, that require a public health response. We should not have to worry about things that are the deliberate result of calculated decisions to make money. We shouldn't do that.

If it hadn't been for your efforts, we might have had to wait another 30 years for the documents that have confirmed our worst suspicions. You did that. For years we've known cigarette makers study kids' habits and tastes, preying on them with targeted marketing. Joe Camel T-shirts, Virginia Slims rock concerts, toy race cars emblazoned with tobacco company logos, the free giveaways tell the tale.

Just last year some tobacco companies wanted to market what some called a kiddie-pack, smaller, more affordable packs of cigarettes, sort of a starter kit. And I was in a community last week in which a person concerned about this told me that more and more cigarettes were being sold to children one by one, for a quarter a piece.

Now, as the documents are released, we begin to learn the whole story. In an internal document, one company proudly described its brand as "the brand of choice among teenagers." Another described its plan to flavor cigarettes with apples, honey, or Coca-Cola because, "it's a well-known fact that teenagers like sweet products." Another company memorandum put it even more bluntly: "The 14 to 24 age group," it says, "represent tomorrow's cigarette business"—and tomorrow's Medicare and Medicaid bills and hospital wards and premature funerals.

This avalanche of evidence is bringing down the walls of deceit. Now we know the facts. Now you have acted. Now Congress must act. Congress must pass comprehensive tobacco legislation that gets the industry out of the business of marketing cigarettes to our children. Thirty years of deception—now Congress must act to bring it to an end. Thirty years of manipulation—Congress must now act to bring it to an end. And it must act now.

Most Americans have 200 days left in their work calendar this year. But the work calendar schedule in Washington is only 68 days, partly because it's an election year, partly because of things that are scheduled for holidays, partly

because Members do have to go home, legitimately, and work in their home States and districts. I say that to say 68 days is not a lot left this year, but it's more than enough to get this job done. The attorneys general have proved that this is not an issue of party but an issue of principle. It's not an issue that divides America but one that can unite us.

I was in Utah the other day, not exactly the strongest Democratic State in America. *[Laughter]* And I was with Senator Bennett and Governor Leavitt and the two House Members, and I said, "It's wonderful that I'm here in Utah with my family just as this tobacco fight is opening. It's the only issue I can think of that all of Utah is to the left of me on"—*[laughter]*—"and praise the Lord for the Mormon Church." *[Laughter]*

But it's a funny story, but it illustrates a very serious and sober point. This is an American issue. This is not about politics. Believe me, there is a solid majority of Congress in both Houses, comprised of members of both parties, who want to do this and do this right. Now, it's a complicated issue; there are complicated questions of the jurisdiction in the Congress, which committees and subcommittees should have this piece or that piece of the legislation. A lot of people are having trouble with how you work out the future liability of the tobacco companies, and how much to give up in return for the advertising fix that we want, which otherwise may not prevail in the courts. You know, there are all these questions out there.

But what I want to tell you is that we can do this. And you have to help us do this. You have to go to the Congress and say, "A thousand kids a day is too high a price to pay for another year's delay." *[Applause]* Thank you. Thank you very much. I think we should say clearly and simply that Congress should not go home until it passes comprehensive tobacco legislation. This is one thing that has to be done this year.

Now, I have said I would support any comprehensive bipartisan legislation if it meets five principles: I believe it must raise the price of cigarettes by up to \$1.50 a pack over the next decade and impose tough penalties on companies that continue to sell to kids; it must reaffirm the FDA's authority to regulate tobacco products; it must get the tobacco companies out of the business of marketing to our children; it must further our other public health goals; and it must protect the tobacco farmers and

their communities. And I take it we're all agreed on that; I think that is very important.

Today I'm happy to report that Senators John Chafee, Bob Graham, and Tom Harkin are introducing the first bipartisan bill that meets all five of these principles, and I strongly support their effort. It is a good, tough bill. I hope it gets wide support. The evidence is clearer than ever that this legislation will save lives. We have now a recent study that says if Congress acts, we can cut teen smoking by almost half in the next 5 years alone. That means we can stop almost 3 million children from beginning. That means we can prevent almost 1 million premature deaths.

Again, I say, sure, there will be important issues to be worked out, even among allies. Even among yourselves, you have to worry about that. I know that. But if you decide that you have to act, then you figure out a way to work out the issues. This 30-year struggle also, I will say, is not about money. There are some budget and spending issues in Congress between me and the Democrats and the Republicans—three or four or five different ideas. But if we just remember this is not about money, it's not about the size of the prize we can extract from the tobacco industry; it is about fulfilling our responsibilities to our children as parents, as a Government, as a Nation.

You have shown enormous courage and foresight in helping us get where we are today. Again I would say, in the heat of the moment do not forget how far we have come. If someone had told you just a couple of years ago we would be here today, hardly a one of you would have believed it. Be proud of what you have done, but bring all your influence to bear on the Congress. It's not a question of party; it's a matter of principle. And it will have a very great deal to do with what your country looks like when your children are sitting where you are today.

Thank you very much, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:16 a.m. in the Grand Ballroom at the Washington Court Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Jim Doyle, president, National Association of Attorneys General; Fred DuVal, Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy Director of Intergovernmental Affairs; Bonnie Campbell, former Iowa attorney general; and Gov. Michael O. Leavitt of Utah.